DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 073 335 AC 014 121

AUTHOR Kreitlow, Burton W.
TITLE The Researchers Role in Facilitating an Interface between Research and Practice in Adult and Continuing Education.
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Adult Educators; *Educational Researchers; Guides; Information Dissemination; Research Needs; *Research Utilization; Role Perception

ABSTRACT

The researchers' role in moving research outcomes to practice is approached from a practical rather than a theoretical standpoint. The roles researchers have played are: (1) the researcher who conducts studies, writes official reports, and leaves the use of the findings to others; (2) the professional who reports his findings in journals and at professional conferences; and (3) the educator and change agent who considers teaching and public service, as well as research, aspects of the profession. Those accepting the third role accept the idea that interface between research and practice is the researcher's responsibility. Three essentials in bringing about an interface between research and practice are: (1) the research must be relevant to the practitioner; (2) the researcher must be involved in the practice of adult education; and (3) the researcher must communicate research plans, practice and research results to the practitioner. Means of dissemination suggested for the third objective are writing, film, TV, videotape, radio, result demonstrations, models, reports at conferences and inservice programs, personal conferences, and teaching. (KM)

ED 073335

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Research Commission AEA and

Research Committee of NAPCAE

"The Researchers Role in Facilitating an Interface Between Research and Practice in Adult and Continuing Education"

Burton W. Kreitlow
Professor of Adult Education
University of Wisconsin (Madiso

This paper will present no new ~~new and~~ theoretical models, report no new research nor attempt to define "interface". It is my goal to treat the topic from a practical rather than a theoretical base.

I've observed at least three general roles researchers have played in moving research outcomes to practice. They're quite simple. I doubt that researchers taking ~~this~~ the first role are really concerned about the move to practice. The three roles are these:

(1) I'm a researcher. I'll write an official report of my study and do it so it meets the most sophisticated criteria or research reporting. The purpose and theoretical rationale will be carefully developed, a documentation of previous research will be tied to the purposes of the study, the research design will be carefully described, the statistical analysis presented in detail and findings identified and related back to the purpose and the rationale.

I'll turn the potential use of the findings over to someone else and get on with some more research.

(2) I'm a professional. My research should be formally reported, should be available in professional journals, to my professional colleagues and at state, regional and

AC014121

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

national research conferences. When that is done I'll get on with more research. Research is my key role.

(3) I'm an educator and change agent. Research is one aspect of my profession. The others are teaching and public service.

The role model is one developed by the Experiment Stations of the Land Grant Colleges. It is based on the assumption that research needs to move from the researcher's office, from the publications and from the conferences to the citizen.

Today's presentation is a product of my bias and my commitment. As a farm boy I used the research outcomes of a Land Grant College. I later became an educator product of that institution as a Cooperative Extension Agent. I had a role of bridging the gap between research on the campus and practice on the farm. And later still I became a professor in a neighboring Land Grant College where I had the freedom and the resources to do research and to facilitate whatever "interface" I could manage.

Thus, I accepted the number 3 role from the above list. Presented here are examples of what I've learned about "interface" in my experience over 25 years of research and dissemination of that research.

There are three essentials for the adult education researcher if he is concerned about an interface between research and practice. I'm sure the communication theorists could give me fancy names for these essentials but I'll start with things I understand:

(1) The research must be of relevence to the practitioner. This is the primary base of the Agricultural Experiment Station experience. The adult educator needs to know what practitioners do in vocational and technical schools, in extension, in libraries and in other agencies.

(2) The researcher must be involved in the practice of adult and continuing education. The agronomist managed his experimental seed plots; he may even have had a farm on the side. The adult educator could well be involved as a continuing learner himself and as an adult teacher beyond experiences with college classes.

(3) The researcher must communicate research plans, practice and research results to the practitioner. This communication is not just telling at conferences or writing reports. The dairy scientist got some bullshit on his boots.

Let's consider these three essentials one at a time.

I. The relevance of research to practice.

Concern with relevance doesn't ignore theoretical research but it does recognize that much of theoretical research deals with long range goals or a search for a generalization about which the tie to practice is not resolved.

The opposite end of the relevance continuum is a direct response to a practical question. The Experiment Station in responding to the question "Why do my cows die when they eat sweet clover?" answered it and in addition solved a human health problem and created a rat poison.

I don't know whether or not adult education researchers can get such phenomenal results but we ought to try answering practical questions raised by teachers and administrators.

A step up the ladder from answering direct field questions is the involvement of the practitioner in research planning and data collection and a continuous testing of reality all through the planning stage. Professional research colleagues at a university or graduate students are not always the best "sounding board" for what is viable in practice.

Another stage on the relevance ladder is involvement of practitioner in the early stages of reporting research results. We put great stock in "pilot testing" research questionnaires and often neglect "pilot testing" research reports. Were we to do this we'd soon realize why some of our reports gather dust. Whether or not a finding is judged important to the field of adult education depends on who answers the question. The ultimate criterion on relevance and importance is with the user.

II. Researcher involvement in practice.

The best reality testing of all is in the researchers engagement in the kind of adult and continuing education activities that truly give him the practitioners perspective on both problem and solution. This can be a "some time" rather than "all the time" experience. The adult education professor researcher should teach an extension class occasionally, he should teach an adult class for the public school or the technical school or even teach an adult church school class if he is so inclined. Or perhaps, better

still enroll for an adult class in an agency other than his own. In an applied field of study like adult education this is far more essential than in the more traditional disciplines of sociology, economics, psychology or anthropology. It may even be more important in adult education than it is in agriculture.

As a researcher-practitioner the adult educator can be a:

1) Reality tester of research potentials
2) Validity tester as data is collected or theories developed
3) Bridge builder between research outcome and practice
4) Vehicle to establish the acceptability of the source to those in the field.

III. Communication of plans, practice and results of research

The first two essentials for interface are closly allied to communication at its roots. Communication of plans, practice and results is built upon these earlier essentials. For example, input into the planning stages of research can be sought from the field. This is useful to the researcher if it is accomplished while there is still flexability. It may also be valuable as a public relations gesture but that should not be the main goal of such involvement.

In adult education we have less opportunity for field experiments than do our dairy or agronomist colleagues. For us, however, it is often essential that data collection involve the potential user of the results. The so called "plots" are classrooms, in-service meetings or groups of administrators and supervisors. Involvement of practitioners in data collection

can have positive outcomes but they are not as likely unless the cooperators understand what the research is all about. Without their involvement in the planning stage a legitimate "NO, it won't work here" would not be surprising. I expect this has happened to all of us who work with graduate student research.

Communication of research results in the final step in the process of establishing that interface with practice. This final step is easier if channels of communication in the planning and researching phases have been opened. Knowing what to do is no guarantee that the researcher will be effective in communication of research results. Sometimes he's too anxious to get on to follow-up research and leaves communication to someone else. The closer the researcher approaches role one, identified earlier, the easier to leave all but one formal report to others.

I'd like to quickly list some selected means of dissemination available to the adult educator who seriously wishes his research to effect practice.

1) Writing
   - Formal research reports
   - Reports in professional journals
   - Monographs
   - Books
   - Bulletins (Experiment Station type)
   - News releases
   - Letters
2) Film
3) T.V., video tape, radio

4) Result demonstrations

5) Models - build and display

6) Reports at conferences and in-service programs

7) Personal conferences

8) Teaching (a related responsibility of most researchers)

At one time or another I've used all of the above. Wise choice of the means of dissemination to fit the particular practitioners can go far to make that interface viable. Writing a highly technical report for classroom teachers, or publishing only 300 copies of a monograph for placement in libraries is inviting an end to interface before it begins. I'd like to share with you the dissemination-interface program of my most recent research. In March 1972 I became involved with the staff of Adult Basic Education in Indiana. They asked me to join them in planning an improvement evaluation of their State ABE program. The intent was for me to direct this evaluation after it was planned. This I did.

The project is nearing completion. The evaluation (research) is complete but until dissemination is complete the project is not complete. This is as it should be.

Here is what has been and is being done to assure an interface between research and practice. It may not be enough. The choices may be wrong or the timing bad but the objective is to use the findings of evaluative research to improve ABE in Indiana.

Decisions on communicating the plans, practice and results were made with that in mind.

A. Communicating plans and practice

1) Research planning session with a selected group of local and State staff from educational and correctional institutions.

2) Review of data gathering instruments by the above group.

3) Interviews with state staff prior to data gathering in the schools and prisons.

B. Communicating results

1) Pre-publication converence with state staff- working draft of report available to participants. Adjustments made in the report plans.

2) Major report - 250 pages

3) Report to teachers - 20 pages, magazine format

4) Slide-cassette report - 30 slides, 30 minutes to be used in local program in-service meetings. (In process)

5) State ABE Workshop - three members of the research team spent two days in conference with ABE teachers and directors.

C. Other dissemination planned

1) Pieces of the main report will be used for local program in-service sessions during 1972-73.

2) Major report will be used as a primary resource in a college ABE credit class Semester II, 1972-73.

If there is to be positive interface between research and practice I'm suggesting that first and foremost it is the researcher's responsibility. It may be done many ways, but however done it requires a commitment to do it.

At the turn of the century one-half of the U. S. work force were farmers. Today 4% of our population are farmers and can produce enough to meet our food and fiber needs plus millions of tons to ship abroad. This can be done because there was an interface between agricultural research and agricultural practice. Would that our research improves adult education as much!

ERIC Clearinghouse
FEB 6 1973
on Adult Education